

Ipswich Historical Commission Minutes
Meeting June 8, 2020
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Members in attendance: Gordon Harris, Lee Hathaway, Linda Grimes, Laura Gresh, Steve Miles, Tess Schutte

Alternate Members: Bill Effner, Tom Schutte.

Also in attendance: Kristen Grubbs of Planning Department, John Muldoon of Ipswich Local News, Nancy Carlisle current chair APDC, Chris Morse former APDC chair, Haley McQuaid summer intern for Planning Department and IHC

Gordon motioned to approve April IHC minutes, Linda seconded, All voted in favor.

Kristen introduced Hailey McQuad.

Hailey is a junior at UMass Amherst with a combined major environmental sustainable climate change with plans to continue her studies at graduate school.

She works 15-20 hours a week and will be working for 10-12 weeks. She is able to work at home for research-based work with some work in the Planning Office. She is interested in working on the High Street project.

Gordon said one of her responsibilities is to update the 2006 partial list of 600-800 historic homes. This list is based on the MACRIS list and website. Sue Nelson initiated this list. Patriot Properties list is not accurate with many houses dated between 1890 and 1920.

High Street Restoration:

Steve thanked Nancy Carlisle and Chris Morse for attending the meeting.

Steve said this is the most sensitive historic restoration project to date. The current budget is \$4.5 million. In April, with DPW Director, Rick Clark -- and Kevin McHugh from engineering firm Coneco presented the current recommendations to restore High Street.

Underground wiring / utilities is not included in the current plans. The addition of putting wires underground will add approximately \$1.5 million to this project.

Chris Morse asked what materials would be used.

Tess agreed that it is important for the IHC to recommend a list of materials we would prefer used and that the DPW needs this guidance.

John said the IHC are not planners and it is not our job to draw up plans.

Tess agreed but said unless we provide specifics they won't do the research to use appropriate materials.

Chris mentioned the name of a historic landscape architect – Ray Dimetz of Jamaica Plain. He also questioned if the revisions needed to meet ADA requirements since it is a historic neighborhood. A landscape architect would be aware of this.

There is a need for the Select Board to consult a historic landscape architect with expertise in developing historic neighborhoods. Providing photos of exact materials for each detail is essential. Reclaimed granite is preferred for historic neighborhoods rather than sharply cut granite curbing.

Lee said when North Main Street DPW project was in process of planning, members of the IHC at that time, presented recommendations to the Select Board. None of their recommendations were implemented.

Gordon mentioned disappointment regarding the striping for cyclist lanes that was promised on Linebrook Road project. The finished road did not have the striping for cyclists.

The IHC could request engaging a historic landscape architect and add this to the planning budget.

Kristen said since this is a chartered responsibility of the IHC, we should compile a list of our concerns and present these to the DPW. This should include the need to hire appropriate consultant to consider the historic characteristics of this neighborhood and make recommendations. Tell the DPW that it is necessary for the IHC to be involved in the next stages. The critical message is that we want a seat at the table.

Steve said actual construction will begin by FY24 and that this is good timing to get involved now.

John said pointing out to the DPW that the town does not have a historic landscape architect involved is important. John stressed the importance of putting utilities underground and used Newburyport as an example. He questioned if the DPW was being sensitive to historic neighborhoods. He used the examples of the "suburban curbing" of sharply cut granite curbs at North Main Street and upper Summer Street as most recent DPW projects. Softer less intrusive curbing would be more appropriate. He said the DPW needs to be sensitive to the unique historic character of Ipswich and that the charter of the IHC states we are to develop and protect the historic assets of the town. He said it was important to consider what High Street will look like in the future.

Gordon showed the group a historic photo of High Street from 1890 with a wide dirt road lined with large Elm Trees. The photo also shows gas lighting. The trees softened the landscape. He said High Street was part of Old Bay Road – the main road that went from Boston to Portsmouth.

John mentioned the example of High Street in historic Deerfield. It is lined with trees and appears to have developed organically. A photo of historic Deerfield has underground utilities with a softened landscape.

Nancy Carlisle added that the historic photo of High Street circa 1890 looks flat. She also agreed that the materials used are important considerations.

Steve noted Phase I is complete and Phase II begins in 2022 and this is the budget cycle. He also said he thought state funding is dependent on ADA compliance.

John thought it was discouraging that the DPW spent thousands of dollars in planning stage without considering input from the IHC or considering the importance of maintaining and enhancing the historic characteristics of the street. He reiterated we legally are required to be part of the planning process. He suggested having the DPW, IHC and a historic landscape architect convene to come up with a proper and sensitive comprehensive plan for High Street.

Steve stressed the necessity of involving the input of a historic landscape architect.

Linda said it is important to reach out to the neighbors on High Street and have them involved.

Nancy said her colleagues at Historic New England might be able to recommend a historic landscape planner.

Gordon thought the Harold Bowen Trust Fund resources might be available to the IHC to hire a consultant if the DPW doesn't have the funds for this. The fund recently contributed to the Old Burial Ground restoration. Gordon also agreed of consult with Paul McGinley.

Kristen said she would speak with other town planners about their relationship with the DPWs and changes to historic neighborhoods.

Gordon suggested looking at other towns and circulating photos to other members.

Laura mentioned this could be done using Google Earth and taking screen shot photos of these examples.

Steve reiterated John's point that we need to involve the IHC in the process of changes to the most historic street in the most historic town in the country.

New Business:

John reported that the application for Appleton Farms to the National Register was rejected.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Gresh

Secretary

Meeting Minutes approved at 7-13-20 IHC Meeting